Six 30-Day Challenges to Help You Learn More and Form Lasting Habits

By Thorin Klosowski; August 1, 2014

30 day challenges are a great way to force yourself out of your comfort zone to take on new skills. You can learn new things, form lasting habits, and find out more about yourself in general. Plus, at just 30 days long, you don't have much to lose.

Why You Should Try a 30 Day Challenge

The idea of a 30 day challenge sounds a bit like a get rich scheme. They're often billed as a magic bullet way to get fit, improve your life, or learn a complicated skill. That's overselling the idea. A 30 day challenge is just that: a challenge to yourself to do something new.

To that end, a 30 day challenge is still a great way to pick up a new skill, start to develop a solid habit, or learn something new. Even if you practice a skill for 30 days straight, you're not going to become an expert, but you will lay the foundation for a lot of new learning.

For me personally, it's mostly about pushing myself out of my comfort zone and into something new. I'm a big fan of 30 day challenges, and I tend to use them to force myself into doing things I don't want to do or things I've always wanted to do. They inherently sound a little silly, but just because they're often silly doesn't mean they're not useful.

30 days is a short, easy to manage time period to try something new, ditch something you've become negatively reliant on, or learn about something you've always been curious about. Here are a few ideas to get started.

Challenge Yourself to Reach Fitness Goals for a Month

Fitness challenges are one of the most common for 30 day challenges, and they're popular enough to have an entire web site dedicated to them. The basic idea is pretty simple: set a fitness goal of some kind for a 30 day period and attempt to reach it.

These goals range pretty wildly depending on your fitness level and interest. For some, deciding to push yourself to run five minutes a day is enough. Others might try a new workout for a month. What you do is up to you, but the point is to push yourself out of your routine and outside your comfort zone.

Pretty much every fitness app out there has some type of monthly challenge built into it (here are a few apps to get you started). Personally, I use the challenges built into Strava for running and cycling. These have pushed me to increase miles on my bike and run a 10k every week to improve my times. The distance goals are especially helpful if you're just trying to keep yourself out on the road.

Devote Time Daily to Learn a New Skill

Learning new skills is great, but it's often hard to find the time to devote to doing it. Because of this, a 30 day challenge works great for all kinds of different skills because you're only dedicating a month to a particular project.

As these things tend to go, the real trick is carving out a bit of time for your work. Thankfully, even dedicating just 15 minutes a day can produce fruitful results. Personally, I always tend to take these types of challenges in two parts. The first part is something like, "practice this skill every day" and the second part is "finish a project within the 30 days." For example, last month I decided I wanted to make my drawing skills less horrible, so I drew every day, with the overarching goal being to produce a not-totally-embarrassing image by the end of the month. My skills are skills pretty terrible, but they're less terrible than they were last month and good enough that I'll continue on drawing now and again.

There are all kinds of great benefits to learning a new skill and plenty of apps that'll help you along the way. 30 days is by no means enough time to get good at something, but it is enough time to make you confident enough to keep trying.

Take a Photo Every Day

These challenges don't have to push the boundaries of your brain or body, they can also just help you pay a little more attention to the world. 30 day photography challenges are incredibly popular and on top of

improving your eye for photography, they're also great ways to force yourself to pause and pay attention to the world.

You can share your photography challenges pretty much anywhere online. Twitter, Flickr, Facebook, and Instagram are all great places to keep them. All you need to do is take a photo every day with a different theme. This could be taking photos of signs, particular color, or whatever else. It's a challenge that still pushes you to try, but doesn't take up nearly as much time as most of the other stuff on this list.

Cook a New Meal Every Day

If your diet is feeling a bit bland, it might be time to spice things up a bit. One way to do this is to try and cook a new meal every day. It doesn't always have to be dinner, nor does it always need to be extravagant, but trying a new meal every day can teach you all kinds of crazy things about cooking.

Personally, I've outlined how I use an app called eMeals to do this. Once a week, I get a random assortment of dishes and a shopping list and then go on to make that meal. For the most part, these don't repeat, so over the last year I've made a brand new dish every single time I've cooked. Of course, pretty much any type of meal planning app can do this. The goal is to teach you new types of cooking skills, taste new foods, and try new styles of dishes you might not of thought to try before.

Save $1,000 in 30 Days

If you're not into skill or habit challenges, personal finance blogger Rami Sethi's challenge to save $1,000 in 30 days might be more up your alley. Saving that much money might sound crazy, but it's pretty doable if do it right.

I'm not trying to save $1 or even $10 per week, because it's not worth changing your behavior for that kind of money. We're aiming to save $1,000 in 30 days. That's why this series will not include suggestions like "Start a garden" or "Buy day-old food from bakeries." I certainly won't tell you to cut your rent or move to a cheaper place, because NOBODY WILL DO IT! Does anyone ever follow those tips? No, but it sure makes other personal-finance authors feel good about themselves for coming up with a suggestion that theoretically, maybe, somehow could save money for the moron who would do it. Not here.

Sethi's tips range from buying generic to creating a "no spending day." The end result is a bit more money in your pocket and hopefully some long-lasting habits that'll help you save money in the months to come as well. Of course, Sethi's tips aren't the end all of finance tips, so if you're looking for more our own Two Cents blog is a good place to start.

Change Your Sleep Schedule

While sleeping might not seem like a great candidate for a 30 day challenge, it seems like every month we hear about a new study that says none of us are getting the right amount of sleep. Sleep isn't one of those habits that's easy to work on either, so 30 days is a pretty good amount of time to change your sleep cycle and get things in order.

That said, it seems like how much sleep you need is always up for debate, but thankfully figuring out your ideal bedtime isn't rocket science. Plus, modern technology like apps and sleep tracking devices can help you home in on the exact number you personally need. Once you get enough sleep, you can start turning that into a lasting habit over the course of 30 days. Start by going to bed and waking up at the same time every day (yes even over the weekend). Over time, tinker with those times until you get to the point where you're feeling nice and refreshed. Not everyone's going to walk away with perfect sleep schedule, but it's worth a shot.

Of course, tons of other challenges exist out there. You can do everything from write a book in a month to record an album. The point is to keep your brain active and learning while still pushing yourself to do new things.

http://lifehacker.com/six-30-day-challenges-to-help-your-learn-more-and-form-1614583798